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09/07/2016

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ART 3910

**Artifact Analysis: A Makeup Brush**

I identify as a performance artist who uses different mediums to express myself. No matter the medium, it is typically through the lens of drag performance. Drag, in a very sanitized definition, is the performance of exaggerated gender. In the transformation aspect of drag, makeup is a very important aspect. A tool used in that process is the makeup brush, which comes in many forms and serves many purposes. This tool is my artifact.

**Visual Analysis**

The makeup brush is a linear object, typically straight and streamlined. It usually consists of a handle area for the user to grasp with a hand. Closer to an end of the brush is a metal band that holds the bristles of the brush in place. Most brushes have a color handle with contrasting bands and bristles. Visually, the makeup brush is a very close cousin to the common paintbrush – both used to apply material to a surface and both have a similar visual appearance.

**Cultural Analysis**

Makeup itself has existed for centuries. Some researchers trace it back 5,000 years, to the beginning of civilization in Sumeria.(1) The application of cosmetics started with using hands and very primitive tools. Eventually puffs and pads became popular with the use of powdered makeup. The beginning of using makeup brushes can be traced firmly to the 14th century. European aristocrats, specifically French nobility, pioneered techniques and utensils to apply makeup and diversified its purpose. Cosmetic companies and brands began to grow and develop in the 19th century with the industrial boom. As more makeup products were created, makeup brushes became more diverse and served different purposes. In modern times, makeup brushes can be used to apply every aspect of cosmetics.

**Material Analysis**

Makeup brushes can usually be typified as either synthetic or natural. Most synthetic brushes are “made of synthetic bristles — hand-crafted out of [materials like polyester and nylon](http://soniakashuk.com/makeup-mythbusters-natural-vs-synthetic-brushes/" \t "_blank). Sometimes they are dyed to look like natural brushes — to a dark cream or brown color — but they can also look like white plastic.” (2) Handles are typically made of lower-level wood byproduct. Natural brushes, of course, involve natural materials – the bristles are typically human or horsehair, the handle is of higher wood quality or a durable plastic, and the band that connects the two is of higher quality aluminum.

**Production Analysis**

Depending on your choice of product, the origin of a makeup brush can vary. This is partly due to the policies of differing companies. I typically buy makeup brush packs containing brushes that vary is size, angle, and purpose. I usually buy mine off of eBay from sellers who are based in China. However, the manufacturers of the brushes are actually from Taiwan.

**Impact**

Makeup brushes, especially in this day and age, are used in every day presentation. These essential utensils are key in making the people we idolize and aspire to look like, look the way they do. Every artist has their tools and it’s safe to say that for makeup artists, the makeup brush is their paintbrush.

Annotations

1. Sarah Schaffer (2006), [*Reading Our Lips: The History of Lipstick Regulation in Western Seats of Power*](https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/10018966), Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard, retrieved 2014-06-05

2. Erdogan, M. (2015, February 26th) *What Kind Of Makeup Brush Should You Use? Here's The Difference Between Synthetic And Natural Brushes.*

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